

# **Indian Rose Annual - IRA 1985**

## **ARISTOCRATS OF THE ROSE WORLD**

### **India's Wild Roses And A Few Others**

**M. S. Viraraghavan**

“..... a musk rose blowing,  
In a green island far from all mens knowing.”  
( Keats)

You would not wonder why wild roses should be considered the aristocrats of the rose world if you had seen their windswept beauty in their remote mountain homes, or stood enraptured before them, dazzled and may be slightly bewildered by the combination of elegance, profusion and fragrance. I, for one, still remember turning a corner on the footpath to the Valley of Flowers in the Himalayas, when suddenly, there was a glint of ruby in the shimmering ice cold waters of the Pushpganga - there, on the opposite bank, and by the side of the wooden bridge across, was a 10 foot bush of *Rosa macrophylla* covered with warm pink, almost claret red flowers set off by golden anthers and a most alluring fragrance - an aristocrat indeed.

In India, though we have many wild roses, we are somewhat unlucky that the majority can be grown only in the mountain areas. But much more can be achieved in the plains than is commonly realized, if a little extra care is taken. Unfortunately, Indian rose lovers seem to have forgotten the classic five petaled beauty of the single rose. To my mortification, I have heard so

many otherwise knowledgeable rosarians point out to the single roses in my collection - I have quite a number - and tell me that 'that does not look like a rose.' Complicated explanations ensue, but the visitor leaves unconvinced with the argument that the true and original form of the rose is the single five petals of the species, and not the complex doubles created by man.

## 1. ROSA GIGANTEA

In many ways the most amazing of all rose species is the aptly named *Rosa gigantea*. I can do no better than to quote the well known authority, Graham Thomas. "*Rosa gigantea*, the giant rose - you might say, the Queen, the Empress of wild roses, ascends in nature to a height of 40 feet or more by means of its strong shoots and hooked prickles with large elegant drooping leaves and great lemon white silky flowers 5" across". In India, this rose is found in Sikkim, in the North East - in Meghalaya and Manipur and in the contiguous areas of Burma and South West China. Not only are the flowers giant, but the hips of this rose are equally large. Nancy Steen in her book, "The Charm of Old Roses", refers to the fruits being sold in the bazaars of Manipur as the Nagas are fond of their sharp taste ! *Rosa gigantea* has made a very significant contribution to the parentage of modern roses, as it is one of the parents of the Tea roses which are, as you know, the progenitors of today's Hybrid Teas. It would seem that the pale yellow and orange colours of the Tea roses as well as the long elegant petals of some of them owe their colour and form to the influence of *Rosa gigantea*. Technically speaking, *Rosa gigantea* has provided the base for the flavonoid yellow colours in the rose world - the only yellows in roses till Pernet Ducher made the historic cross with *Rosa foetida*, the Persian Yellow rose towards the end of the last century. *Rosa gigantea* has also been used by the late Sir Alistair Clark of Melbourne to raise a

series of climbers e. g. Nancy Hayward, Lorraine Lee etc., which are admirably adapted to the Australian climate. Similar work was done by the French Breeder, Nabonnand. Indian hybridizers should repeat these crosses and may be, with a little bit of luck, we could have the long awaited climbers suitable for the plains of India.

## 2. INDIA'S MUSK ROSES: *ROSA BRUNONII*, *ROSA LONGICUSPIS* & *ROSA LESCHENAULTIANA*.

I now take up the wild roses which are found in India which can be broadly classed as part of the musk rose complex. We have 3 of them - all climbers. One of the most prominent is the Himalayan *R. Brunonii* ( *R. moschata brunonii* ) which has in ample measure that most endearing characteristic of the musk rose - the capacity to waft fragrance in the air. Many beautiful bushes of this rose could be seen on the footpath to the Valley of Flowers, covered with white blooms and emitting a most delicious fragrance. One of the most famous clones of this rose is *R. brunonii* La Mortola, named after the well known garden of that name in Italy.

Another North Indian member of the musk rose group is *R. Longicuspis* which again has white flowers in clusters and is found in the Khasia and Mishmi Hills.

The third Indian representative is *R. Leschenaultiana* ( *R. Moschata leschenaultiana* ) which is the musk rose of the Nilgiri and Palni Hills. This rose, which is fairly common near Kodaikanal, (where I live) has striking plum coloured stems and bears clusters of scented creamy white blossoms. The golden anthers set off the beauty of the rose. *R. leschenaultiana* is probably one of the most obscure members of this group - so obscure that the rose hybridiser's bible, Modern Roses 8, refers to it as not known to be cultivated. I am the proud possessor of a giant

bush, clambering over my greenhouse and providing welcome shade to the tender plants within. Sadly, efforts at hybridisation with this rose have not made much headway so far.

Other musk roses have played a part in the evolution of the modern rose. Members of this group are the ancestors of the Noisette roses, for e. g. the golden Marechal Neil, which is still popular in India. More obscurely these roses are connected to the Pemberton Hybrid Musks like Prosperity, Vanity etc. and even more remotely to the modern Hybrid Musk shrubs of the type of Hamburg, Bonn, Elmshorn and the like, raised by Kordes.

### 3. *ROSA CLINOPHYLLA* ( *R. INVOLUCRATA* )

Perhaps the most interesting of India's roses, from the Indian rose hybridiser's point of view, is the white flowered *R. clinophylla* which has the uncommon distinction of being a wild rose found in the tropical tracts of India, especially in the plains of Bengal - maybe it is the only wild rose of the tropical tracts anywhere in the world. There are exciting possibilities of hybridisation with this rose, which I have referred to earlier in detail in my article " Vistas in Rose Hybridisation", in the 1983 Indian Rose Annual. So without repeating myself, here is a golden opportunity for the enterprising hybridiser to produce for the first time roses suited to the tropical heat. Sri Narender Singh of the Ranchi Rose Society informed me that he had seen this rose growing in abundance on the banks of streams in Ranchi areas almost to the water's edge.

Another interesting point is that this species is closely related to the black spot resistant *R. bracteata*, with which I deal later.

### 4. *ROSA MACROPHYLLA* :

Here we have one of the most spectacular of India's roses in eye catching shades of warm rose pink, found in the mountainous areas of the country,

from Kashmir eastwards to Sikkim, as also in Pakistan and China - at altitudes of 2100 m - 3800 m. Interestingly there are both diploid and tetraploid versions of this rose. The tetraploid could well be used by Indian breeders. Readers would be interested to know that *R. macrophylla* was used by the famous botanist G. G. Hurst in one of his interspecific crosses which led to the hybrid sub-species *R x coryana* ( *R. macrophylla* x *R. roxburghii* ). McGredy describes this diploid hybrid as a tall sparingly prickly shrub with single rich pink flowers 2" in diameter. McGredy himself has used it to produce the floribunda Maxi, very disease resistant, which again is in the background of his Hand painted roses, Old Master and Regensburg. The well known American breeder Boerner also seems to have used this species to evolve the floribunda shrub Mandarin, which has blooms of a warm rose pink.

Apart from the flowers one feature of *R. macrophylla* is its very large hips - the largest bottle shaped hips of any rose according to the rose authority, Bertram Park.

#### 5. *ROSA WEBBIANA*

This is one more Indian species bearing flowers in shades of pink - in this case with a hint of lilac. It is the wild rose of the Western Himalayas, favouring the comparatively drier regions at altitudes of 1500m - 4100m. In its typical forms it is a shrub with slender branches and straight prickles but apparently some forms of this are very near some of the variants of *R. macrophylla* referred to earlier.

#### 6. *ROSA SERICEA*

This rose has the special distinction of being the only wild rose with four petals and not the usual five. Giant shrubs of this could be seen in plenty above the 3000 m level on the way to the Valley of Flowers. Curiously the

fierce thorns have a strange beauty rivaling that of the whitish cream flowers borne in profusion. In fact, in the form *R. Sericea pteracantha* the stems bear large thorns shaped like wings of eye-catching deep red, semitransparent when young, – altogether a flower arranger's delight.

#### 7. *ROSA EGLANTERIA* (*R. Rubiginosa*)

One more of the pink flowered wild roses found in India is the species commonly referred to as the Sweet Briar—Shakespeare's Eglantine. It is common in the north western regions of the Himalayas in Gilgit, Kashmir, though Firminger in his “Manual of Gardening in India” refers to the plant being grown in the North Indian plains also. An interesting feature of this rose is the apple like scent of its leaves most evident when the weather is moist. A noteworthy series of hybrids called Penzance Briars were raised by Lord Penzance in England, using *R. eglanteria* as one of the parents. These include crosses with the yellow *R. foetida*, but do not appear to be grown in India. Much later, Kordes used the rose variety Magnifica, a self seedling, of one of the Penzance briars, Lucy Ashton, extensively in his rose breeding work to produce roses better able to stand up to the harsh German winters. One of these is the scarlet floribunda, Florence Mary Morse, which some of you may have seen, and which is doing very well with me in Kodaikanal.

#### 8. *ROSA FOETIDA* & *ROSA ECAE* :

*R. foetida*, which is the golden yellow rose of Iran is found in India in the similar climatic belt of Kashmir. Oleg Polunin and Adam Stainton in “Flowers of the Himalayas” observe that it is semi naturalized in Lahul ( H. P.). The species bears rich yellow flowers with a curious penetrating “heavy” fragrance which is not to everyone's taste. Hence the name ‘foetida’. Nonetheless it is one of the most striking of all roses and even more striking is its sport, *R. foetida*

*bicolour* with red reverse yellow flowers. All the bright yellow as also the bicolour roses of our modern gardens owe their colour to *R. foetida* which is one of the oldest roses known to be cultivated by man. Bertram Park mentions in "The World of Roses" that in the ruins of the palace of Knossos, Crete, over 4000 years old, were found well preserved wall paintings with decorations obviously inspired by this rose.

There is an interesting legend, also referred to by Bertram Park on the origin of the yellow rose; where the Prophet Mohamed used a bunch of ordinary pink roses as a test of chastity. The unsuspecting lady, of dubious virtue, was asked by the Prophet to fling the bunch of pink roses which she held in her hand, into a pool in the town of Medina. Lo and behold the flowers turned a bright yellow in proof of her guilt!!

It may be possible to grow this species in the colder parts of our country as Firminger refers to flowering it successfully in Ferozepur, in Punjab.

*R. ecae* is another bright yellow rose species of Western Asia which has become naturalized in India. It is even used in hedges around Kargil in Ladakh. A beautiful hybrid, Golden Chersonese (*R. ecae* x Canary Bird) by E. F. Allen of England has been raised from this species but it does not seem to be available in India.

#### 9. *ROSA LAEVIGATA* :

One of the most beautiful of wild roses is *R. laevigata* also known as the Cherokee Rose, or Mardan White. This rose is originally from China but has been naturalized in U. S. A. Indeed it is the State flower of Georgia. In India also *R. laevigata* is grown in a number of places - for, e. g. Delhi and Kodaikanal, and is naturalized extensively in the Khatmandu Valley, Nepal. The reason for this wide distribution is not far to seek. *R. laevigata* produces large white single flowers with beautiful golden anthers. The petal texture is extraordinarily good and the flower retains its beauty for a

few days. But in a way even more beautiful than the flowers are the striking leaves - shining bright green, dense, with three leaflets and nearly double the size of a normal rose leaf. The leaves alone would place this plant a class ahead of other roses. Unfortunately this very attractive rose has proved quite difficult to hybridise. One of the few hybrids available in India is Mardan Pink (also known as Sinica Anemone and Pink Cherokee) which bears single pink flowers in profusion once a year. A charming white flowered hybrid raised in the U. S. by Dr. Walter Van Fleet is the aptly named Silver Moon - reputedly one of the most vigorous of climbers, easily reaching 40 feet. But this does not seem to be available in India. Altogether one of the most aristocratic of roses, I feel a determined effort should be made to breed with *R. laevigata*, as the foliage characteristics would revolutionize roses. If it was possible to create a Hybrid Tea with this kind of foliage, it would take the world by storm - at least the sub-tropical areas, as *R. laevigata* is somewhat frost tender.

#### 10. *ROSA BANKSIAE* :

This species, commonly referred to as the Banksian rose, is available in two colours - white and yellow. Both forms are vigorous climbers with long thornless stems and flowers borne on slender stalks - one of the few roses which are absolutely thornless. The Banksian roses are grown in a number of places in India, especially in hillstations e.g. Simla, Ooty and Kodaikanal but (especially the white version) can easily be grown in the cooler sections of the plains too. The long drooping stems render the white Banksian an ideal subject for weeping standards - such standard roses can be seen in large numbers in North India, e. g. Sunder Nursery, New Delhi. The Guinness Book of Records refers to a unique hundred year old specimen of the white Banksian rose in Arizona, U.S.A. covering an area of 5380 sq. ft., and producing hundreds of thousands of blooms in spring.



150 persons can be seated under the arbour formed by this rose. Such is the magnificence of this rose given the right climate

Hybridising work with these roses has not been very successful - though the Italian breeder, Mansuino has produced a white flowered climber, Purezza.

#### 11. *ROSA BRACTEATA* :

*R. bracteata*, which is a native of Burma and China, is closely related to *R. clinophylla* referred to earlier. Graham Thomas, quoting the famous plant explorer, Kingdon Ward ("Plant Hunting On the Edge of the World"): "Forty miles from Myitkyina in Burma" - (within 200 miles of the Indian border near Manipur) - "the botanist gets his first thrill. Here, the long ribs of slate rock, which in March, are exposed in the riverbed are covered with wild roses (*R. bracteata*) and crimson azalea (*Rhododendron indicum*)". Readers may note the close similarity to *R. clinophylla*, in that both roses are lovers of moisture and found on the banks of streams. *R. bracteata* is one of the most striking of wild roses bearing flowers about 3" across, pure white, with an eye-catching silky appearance, further adorned by orange yellow stamens. The name 'Bracteata' refers to the leafy bracts surrounding the flowers.

Here again the leaves are very beautiful, being glossy - of darkest green, and with the most unusual characteristic of being blunt at the apex. Unlike many other species roses this is virtually perpetual flowering, and to cap it all, the species has a marked resistance to black spot. In spite of so many enviable qualities very few hybrids have been raised from *R. bracteata*. One of the most splendid is that breathtaking climber, Mermaid which is a cross with a yellow tea rose. This, one of the most beautiful of all climbers, bears huge, single creamy yellow flowers with the same beautiful stamens of the species. Unfortunately Mermaid is better suited to the climate of

Indian hill-stations. But *R. bracteata* can probably easily be grown in places with a climate similar to Delhi. For a long time Mermaid was considered to be sterile. But the English breeder Le Grice, in a remarkable cross between Mermaid and the climbing rose, New Dawn, has recently introduced a floribunda shrub, Pearl Drift. This produces bunches of flowers of a lovely milk white stained pink, and being available in India, is worth the attention of rose lovers, if only for its unique parentage.

## 12. *ROSA BEGGERIANA* :

To conclude this article I will deal briefly with *R. beggeriana* which again is a wild rose of Western Asia, but quite common in the Kashmir Valley. This white flowered semi-climbing shrub, is perhaps not the most striking of wild roses, but it has a very important plus point - the hips contain an unbelievably high concentration of Vitamin C. Research in Poland has shown that these hips contain as much as 5020 mg % of Vitamin C (i. e. 5020 mg in 100 gms of hip). An interesting series of hybrids with *R. rugosa* have been evolved, also in Poland, so as to combine the large hips of *R. rugosa* and the high vitamin C content of *R. beggariana*, with considerable success.

Now the galaxy is complete - Indian wild roses are certainly among the most aristocratic of Roses. While some can be grown in the climate of the plains, no rose lover should miss the opportunity of seeing them in their native habitat – the 'green islands' of the Himalayas - truly an unforgettable experience.



Copies of the original  
Indian Rose Annual 1985

# ARISTOCRATS OF THE ROSE WORLD

## India's Wild Roses And A Few Others

M. S. Viraraghavan\*

".....a musk rose blowing, In a green island  
far from all mens knowing."

(Keats)

You would not wonder why wild roses should be considered the aristocrats of the rose world if you had seen their windswept beauty in their remote mountain homes, or stood enraptured before them, dazzled and may be slightly bewildered by the combination of elegance, profusion and fragrance. I, for one still remember turning a corner on the footpath to the Valley of Flowers in the Himalayas, when suddenly, there was a glint of ruby in the shimmering ice cold waters of the Pushpganga—there, on the opposite bank, and by the side of the wooden bridge across, was a 10 foot bush of *Rosa Macrophylla* covered with warm pink, almost claret red flowers set off by golden anthers and a most alluring fragrance—an aristocrat indeed.

In India, though we have many wild roses, we are somewhat unlucky that the majority can be grown only in the mountain areas. But much more can be achieved in the plains than is commonly realized, if a little extra care is taken. Unfortunately, Indian rose lovers seem to have forgotten the classic five petalled beauty of the single rose. To my mortification I have heard so many otherwise knowledgeable rosarians point out to the single roses in my collection—I have quite a number—and tell me that 'that does not look like a rose.' Complicated explanations ensue, but the visitor leaves unconvinced with the argumnet that the

\* Hill View, Fern Hill Road, Kodakkal-624 101, Tamilnadu.

true and original form of the rose is the single five petals of the species, and not the complex doubles created by man.

## 1. ROSA GIGANTEA

In many ways the most amazing of all rose species is the aptly named *Rosa Gigantea*. I can do no better than to quote the well known authority, Graham Thomas "*Rosa Gigantea*, the giant rose—you might say, the Queen, the Empress of wild roses, ascends in nature to a height of 40 feet or more by means of its strong shoots and hooked prickles with large elegant drooping leaves and great lemon white silky flowers 5" across." In India this rose is found in Sikkim, in the North East—in Meghalaya and Manipur and in the contiguous areas of Burma and South West China. Not only are the flowers giant, but the hips of this rose are equally large. Nancy Steene in her book, "*The Charm of Old Roses*", refers to the fruits being sold in the bazaars of Manipur as the Nagas are fond of their sharp taste!

*Rosa Gigantea* has made a very significant contribution to the parentage of modern roses, as it is one of the parents of the Tea roses which are, as you know, the progenitors of today's Hybrid Teas. It would seem that the pale yellow and orange colours of the Tea roses as well as the long elegant petals of some of them owe their colour and form to the influence of *Rosa Gigantea*. Technically speaking, *Rosa Gigantea* has provided the base for the flavonoid yellow colours in the rose world—the only yellows in roses till Pernet Ducher made the historic cross with *Rosa Foetida*, the Persian Yellow rose towards the end of the last century. *Rosa Gigantea* has also been used by the late Sir Alistair Clark of Melbourne to raise a series of climbers e. g. Nancy Hayward, Lorraine Lee etc., which are admirably adapted to the Australian climate. Similar work was done by the French

breeder Nabonnand. Indian hybridizers should repeat these crosses and may be, with a little bit of luck, we could have the long awaited climbers suitable for the plains of India.

## **2. INDIA'S MUSK ROSES : ROSA BRUNONII : ROSA LONGICUSPIS & ROSA LESCHINAULTIANA.**

I now take up the wild roses which are found in India which can be broadly classed as part of the musk rose complex. We have 3 of them—all climbers. One of the most prominent is the Himalayan R. Brunonii ( R. Moschate Brunonii ) which has in ample measure that most endearing characteristic of the musk rose—the capacity to waft fragrance in the air. Many beautiful bushes of this rose could be seen on the foot-path to the Valley of Flowers, covered with white blooms and emitting a most delicious fragrance. One of the most famous clones of this rose is R. Brunonii La Mortola, named after the well known garden of that name in Italy.

Another North Indian member of the musk rose group is R. Longicuspis which again has white flowers in clusters and is found in the Khasia and Mishms Hills.

The third Indian representative is R. Leschinaultiana ( R. Moschata Leschinaultiana ) which is the musk rose of the Nilgiri and Palani Hills. This rose, which is fairly common near Kodaikanal, has striking plum coloured stems and bears clusters of scented creamy white blossoms. The golden anthers set off the beauty of the rose. R. Leschinaultiana is probably one of the most obscure members of this group—so obscure that the rose hybridiser's bible, Modern Roses 3, refers to it as not known to be cultivated. I am the proud possessor of a giant bush, clambering over my greenhouse and providing welcome shade to the tender



plants within. Sadly, efforts at hybridisation with this rose have not made much headway so far.

Other musk roses have played a part in the evolution of the modern rose. Members of this group are the ancestors of the Noisette roses, for e. g. the golden Marechal Neil, which is still popular in India. More obscurely these roses are connected to the Pemberton Hybrid Musks like Prosperity, Vanity etc. and even more remotely to the modern Hybrid Musk shrubs of the type of "Hamburg, Bonn, Elmshorn and the like, raised by Kordes.

### **3. ROSA CLINOPHYLLA ( R. INVOLUCRATA )**

Perhaps the most interesting of India's roses, from the Indian rose hybridiser's point of view, is the white flowered *R. Clinophylla* which has the uncommon distinction of being a wild rose found in the tropical tracts of India, especially in the plains of Bengal—maybe it is the only wild rose of the tropical tracts anywhere in the world. There are exciting possibilities of hybridisation with this rose, which I have referred to earlier in detail in my article "Vistas in Rose Hybridisation" in the 1983 Indian Rose Annual. So without repeating myself, here is a golden opportunity for the enterprising hybridiser to produce for the first time roses suited to the tropical heat. Sri, Narender Singh of the Ranchi Rose Society informed me that he had seen this rose growing in abundance on the banks of streams in Ranchi areas almost to the water's edge.

Another interesting point is that this species is closely related to the black spot resistant *R. Bracteata*, with which I deal later.

### **4. ROSA MACROPHYLLA :**

Here we have one of the most spectacular of India's roses in eyecatching shades of warm rosepink,



found in the mountainous areas of the country, from Kashmir eastwards to Sikkim, as also in Pakistan and China—at altitudes of 2100 m—3800 m. Interestingly there are both diploid and tetraploid versions of this rose. The tetraploid could well be used by Indian breeders. Readers would be interested to know that *R. Macrophylla* was used by the famous botanist C. C. Hurst in one of his interspecific crosses which led to the hybrid sub-species *R x Coryana* (*R. Macrophylla* x *R. Roxburghii*). McGredy describes this diploid hybrid as a tall sparingly prickly shrub with single rich pink flowers 2½" in diameter. McGredy himself has used it to produce the floribunda *Maxi*, very disease resistant, which again is in the background of his Handpainted roses, *Old Master* and *Regensburg*. The well known American breeder Boerner also seems to have used this species to evolve the floribunda shrub *Mandarin*, which has blooms of a warm rose pink.

Apart from the flowers one feature of *R. Macrophylla* is its very large hips—the largest bottle shaped hips of any rose according to the rose authority, *Bertram Park*.

## **5. ROSA WEBBIANA :**

This is one more Indian species bearing flowers in shades of pink—in this case with a hint of lilac. It is the wild rose of the Western Himalayas, favouring the comparatively drier regions at altitudes of 1500m-4100m. In its typical forms it is a shrub with slender branches and straight prickles but apparently some forms of this are very near some of the variants of *R. Macrophylla* referred to earlier.

## **6. ROSA SERICA :**

This rose has the special distinction of being the only wild rose with four petals and not the usual five. Giant shrubs of this could be seen in plenty above

the 3000 m level on the way to the Valley of Flowers. Curiously the fierce thorns have a strange beauty rivalling that of the whitish cream flowers borne in profusion. In fact, in the form *R. Serica Pteracantha* the stems bear large thorns shaped like wings of eye-catching deep red, semitransparent when young,—altogether a flower arranger's delight.

### 7. **ROSA EGLANTERIA** (*R. Rubiginosa*)

One more of the pink flowered wild roses found in India is the species commonly referred to as the Sweet Briar—Shakespeare's Eglantine. It is common in the north western regions of the Himalayas in Gilgit, Kashmir, though Firminger in his 'Manual of Gardening in India' refers to the plant being grown in the North Indian plains also. An interesting feature of this rose is the apple like scent of its leaves most evident when the weather is moist. A noteworthy series of hybrids called Penzance Briars were raised by Lord Penzance in England, using *R. Eglanteria* as one of the parents. These include crosses with the yellow *R. Foetida*, but do not appear to be grown in India. Much later, Kordes used the rose variety *Magnifica*, a self seedling, of one of the Penzance briars, Lucy Ashton, extensively in his rose breeding work to produce roses better able to stand up to the harsh German winters. One of these is the scarlet floribunda, Florence Mary Morse, which some of you may have seen, and which is doing very well with me in Kodaikanal.

### 8. **ROSA FOETIDA & ROSA ECAE :**

*R. Foetida*, which is the golden yellow rose of Iran is found in India in the similar climatic belt of Kashmir. Oleg Polunin and Adam Stainton in "Flowers of the Himalayas" observe that it is semi naturalized in Lahul (H. P.) The species bears rich yellow flowers with a curious penetrating 'heavy' fragrance which is not to everyone's taste. Hence the

name Foetida. Nonetheless it is one of the most striking of all roses and even more striking is its sport, R. Foetida bicolour with red reverse yellow flowers. All the bright yellow as also the bicolour roses of our modern gardens owe their colour to R. Foetida which is one of the oldest roses known to be cultivated by man. Bertram Park mentions in the "World of Roses" that in the ruins of the palace of Knossos, Crete, over 4000 years old, were found well preserved wall paintings with decorations obviously inspired by this rose.

There is an interesting legend, also referred to by Bertram Park on the origin of the yellow rose; where the Prophet Mohamed used a bunch of ordinary pink roses as a test of chastity. The unsuspecting lady, of dubious virtue, was asked by the Prophet to fling the bunch of pink roses which she held in her hand, into a pool in the town of Medina. Lo and behold the flowers turned a bright yellow in proof of her guilt!

It may be possible to grow this species in the colder parts of our country as Firminger refers to flowering it successfully in Ferozepur, in Punjab.

R. Ecac is another bright yellow rose species of Western Asia which has become naturalized in India. It is even used in hedges around Kargil in Ladakh. A beautiful hybrid, Golden Chersonese (R. Ecac x Canary Bird) by E. F. Allen of England has been raised from this species but it does not seem to be available in India.

## 9. ROSA LAEVIGATA :

One of the most beautiful of wild roses is R. Laevigata also known as the Cherokee Rose, or Mardan White. This rose is originally from China but has been naturalized in U. S. A. Indeed it is the State flower of Georgia. In India also R. Laevigata is grown in a number of places—for e. g. Delhi and Kodaikanal, and is naturalized extensively in the



Khatmandu Valley, Nepal. The reason for this wide distribution is not far to seek. *R. Laevigata* produces large white single flowers with beautiful golden anthers. The petal texture is extraordinarily good and the flower retains its beauty for a few days. But in a way even more beautiful than the flowers are the striking leaves—shining bright green, dense, with three leaflets and nearly double the size of a normal rose leaf. The leaves alone would place this plant a class ahead of other roses. Unfortunately this very attractive rose has proved quite difficult to hybridise. One of the few hybrids available in India is Mardan Pink (also known as Sinica Anemone and Pink Cherokee.) which bears single pink flowers in profusion once a year. A charming white flowered hybrid raised in the U. S. by Dr. Walter Van Fleet is the aptly named Silver Moon—reputedly one of the most vigorous of climbers, easily reaching 40 feet. But this does not seem to be available in India. Altogether one of the most aristocratic of roses, I feel a determined effort should be made to breed with *R. Laevigata*, as the foliage characteristics would revolutize roses. If it was possible to create a Hybrid Tea with this kind of foliage, it would take the world by storm—at least the sub-tropical areas, as *R. Laevigata* is somewhat frost tender.

#### 10. *ROSA BANKSIAE* :

This species, commonly referred to as the Banksian rose, is available in two colours—white and yellow. Both forms are vigorous climbers with long thorn-less stems and flowers borne on slender stalks—one of the few roses which are absolutely thornless. The Banksian roses are grown in a number of places in India, especially in hillstations e. g. Simla, Ooty and Kodai-kanal but (especially the white version) can easily be grown in the cooler sections of the plains too. The long drooping stems render the white Banksian an ideal subject for weeping standards—such standard

roses can be seen in large numbers in North India, e. g. Sunder Nursery, New Delhi. The Guinness Book of Records refers to an unique hundred year old specimen of the white Banksian rose in Arizona, U.S.A. covering an area of 5380 sq. ft., and producing hundreds of thousands of blooms in spring. 150 persons can be seated under the arbour formed by this rose. Such is the magnificence of this rose given the right climate !

Hybridising work with these roses has not been very successful—though the Italian breeder, Mansuino has produced a white flowered climber, Purezza.

## 11. ROSA BRACTEATA :

R. Bracteata, which is a native of Burma and China, is closely related to R. Clinophylla referred to earlier. Graham Thomas, quoting the famous plant explorer, Kingdon Ward ( "Plant Hunting On the Edge of the World" ) : "Forty miles from Myitkyina in Burma"— (within 200 miles of the Indian border near Manipur)— "the botanist gets his first thrill. Here, the long ribs of slate rock, which in March, are exposed in the riverbed are covered with wild roses ( R. Bracteata ) and crimson azalea ( Rhododendron Indicum )". Readers may note the close similarity to R. Clinophylla, in that both roses are lovers of moisture and found on the banks of streams. R. Bracteata is one of the most striking of wild roses bearing flowers about 3" across, pure white, with an eye-catching silky appearance, further adorned by orange yellow stamens. The name Bracteata refers to the leafy bracts surrounding the flowers.

Here again the leaves are very beautiful, being glossy—of darkest green, and with the most unusual characteristic of being blunt at the apex. Unlike many other species roses this is virtually perpetual flowering, and to cap it all, the species has a marked resistance to black spot. In spite of so many enviable qualities

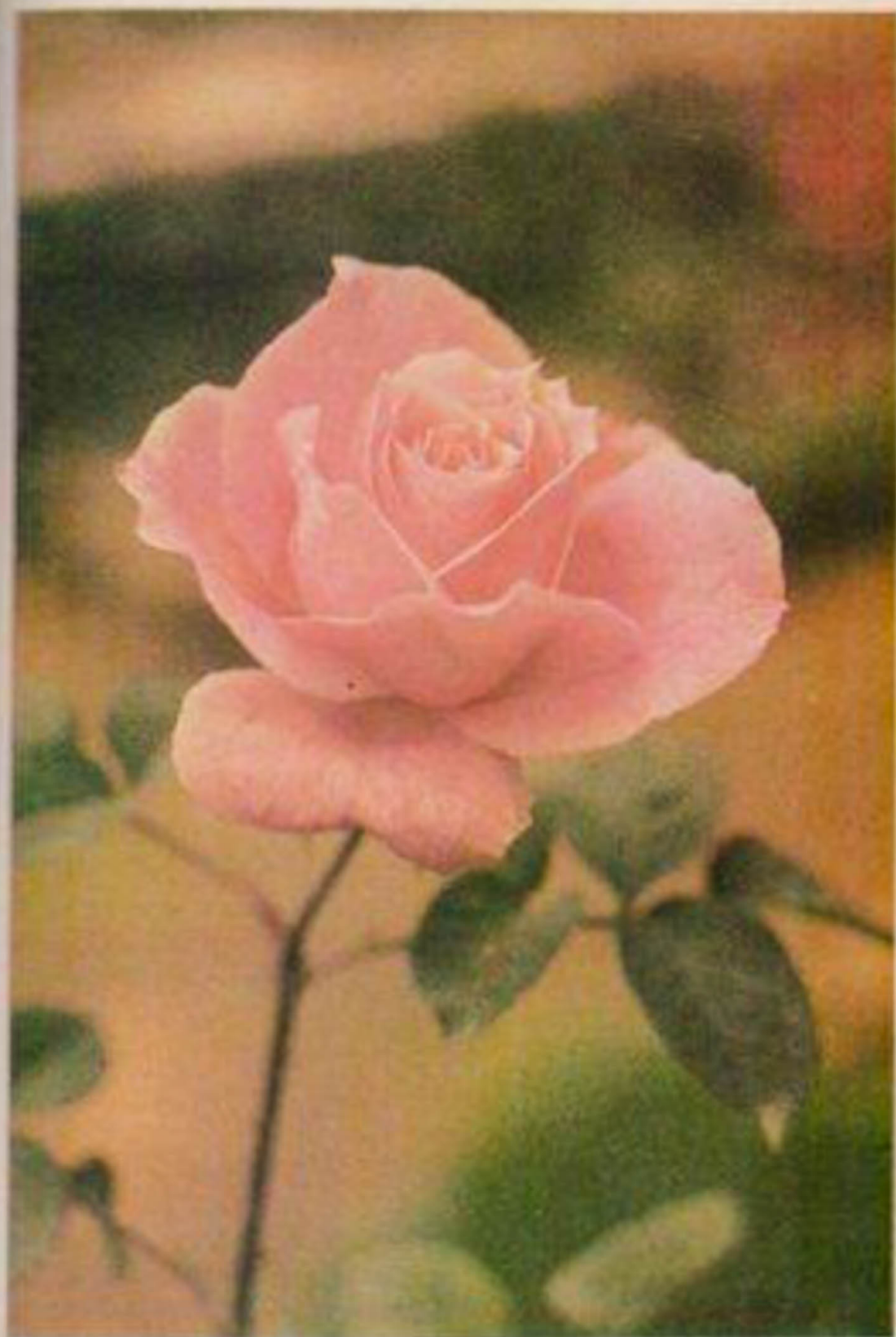
very few hybrids have been raised from *R. Bracteata*, One of the most splendid is that breathtaking climber, *Mermaid* which is a cross with a yellow tea rose. This, one of the most beautiful of all climbers, bears huge, single creamy yellow flowers with the same beautiful stamens of the species. Unfortunately *Mermaid* is better suited to the climate of Indian hill-stations. But *R. Bracteata* can probably easily be grown in places with a climate similar to Delhi. For a long time *Mermaid* was considered to be sterile. But the English breeder Le Grice, in a remarkable cross between *Mermaid* and the climbing rose, *New Dawn*, has recently introduced a floribunda shrub, *Pearl Drift*. This produces bunches of flowers of a lovely milk white stained pink, and being available in India, is worth the attention of rose lovers, if only for its unique parentage.

## 12. *ROSA BEGGARIANA* :

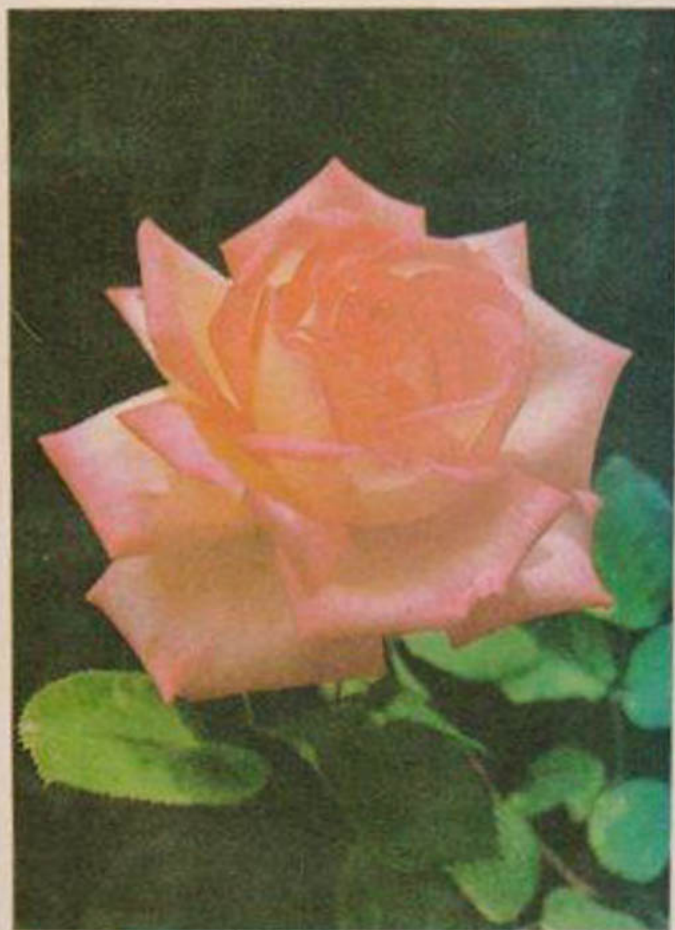
To conclude this article I will deal briefly with *R. Beggeriana* which again is a wild rose of Western Asia, but quite common in the Kashmir Valley. This white flowered semi-climbing shrub, is perhaps not the most striking of wild roses, but it has a very important plus point—the hips contain an unbelievably high concentration of Vitamin C. Research in Poland has shown that these hips contain as much as 5020 mg. % of Vitamin C (i. e. 5020 mg. in 100 gms. of hip). An interesting series of hybrids with *R. Rugosa* have been evolved, also in Poland, so as to combine the large hips of *R. Rugosa* and the high vitamin C content of *R. Beggariana*, with considerable success.

Now the galaxy is complete—Indian wild roses are certainly among the most aristocratic of Roses. While some can be grown in the climate of the plains, no rose lover should miss the opportunity of seeing them in their native habitat—the 'green islands' of the Himalayas—truly an unforgettable experience.





RAJNI : ( M. S. Viraraghavan, 1983. Introduced by Anand Roses )  
Hybrid Tea. ( Violaine x Margaret Merrill ). Giant, impeccably  
fashioned very fragrant blooms of pink with distinct lilac  
shadings.



Unnamed H. T. seedling ( M. S. Viranaghavan )  
( Royal Dane x Priyatama ) in the handpainted  
strain, very large beautifully shaped flowers  
showing the much desired combination of yellow  
with orange markings.

Photo : R. Hareesh